

Servant to All

by Thaddeus Barnum

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of Christ that shifts our focus from self to serving others as a reflection of God's love and grace.

Duration: 27:40

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 14:8, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 3:1, 1 Corinthians 9:18-19

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power of God's Spirit and the need for believers to rise up and take the world by force. He emphasizes the importance of compassion, mercy, and love, and encourages the congregation to go out and love others. The preacher shares a personal story about his father's final moments and how it reminded him of the calling to serve others. He then delves into the passage from 1 Corinthians 9, highlighting the contrast between the self-centeredness of the world and the selflessness of the kingdom of God. The preacher urges the congregation to reject the worldly principle of 'me' and instead embrace the servant-hearted nature of Jesus.

Transcript

Almighty God, Almighty Father, here we are with hands open and hearts open to receive from you what you have for us, that we might behold your Son, that the presence of your Holy Spirit might fill us and cleanse us and wash us and grow us to all that you've called us to be, living to the praise of the glory of your Holy Name. We ask all these things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Good morning. It is a joy to be able to serve this morning and to bring this text of 1st Corinthians 9. If you've got your Bibles, if we could go to 1st Corinthians 9. I've got a portion of it, verse 19 in particular, up on the screen this morning, and the reason is I'd like you to stare at it, because in fact it is so contrary, it is such a difficult passage to read, and I'll tell you why. You and I are born into this world with a fundamental operating principle in play.

It's not a hard principle to understand. As a matter of fact, many of us quite enjoy the principle. We've lived it all our lives, and we actually like to tell other people about it, and that principle is, in one word, are you ready for it? Me! It is the way we are born into this world.

We start in this world, it's a very small world, it's a confined world, but we are the center of that world, and as we grow up in a few years, we soon find this disturbing fact that there are others in the world also, and

they don't seem to understand the operating principle upon which this world turns. Me! They don't understand. Me! They think, it's very odd, they think it's about them, which it just causes, it causes friction, it causes clashes.

I would say to you that I don't have to go and spend all my money to be a doctor of philosophy, I think I can figure it out. I think I know what's going on behind the fundamental principle that drives business, drives law, drives our economy. It's all built on this principle.

It's how relationships both work and don't work, built on this principle. It's how politics works, it's how war happens, it's all about protecting self-interest. Everything's driven in adult language, it's protecting self-interest.

And why not understand it? One discourse with the Bible, and we begin to hear who Jesus called the ruler of this world. He's called from the beginning, the serpent of old, the devil. What drives him? What's his passion? What makes his day tick? I'll tell you what it is.

This principle. Me! Self-exaltation, pride, the drive to be at the fundamental center. My friends, that's why the world ticks the way it does.

Why there are constant envies and jealousies and divisions and confusions and conflicts and divorces and wars. We're always at each other's because all of us have this compulsion, this obsession for self. And it's there, and we know it, and somewhere inside of us we know it deeply, personally.

It's called in the Scriptures, the way it's evolved, it's called the original sin. It's called the sin nature. It's what drives us, that we are me at the center.

And that's why the first principle of growing up, the first step that happens for us, it's a beginning step, but this is it. We suddenly realize we are not the center of our world, God is. Now you'll notice that many people will go all their days, live all their breath, do all these things, they will never grow up, they will never know this principle, fundamental, we are not the center, God is.

And that's why there is nothing like that moment when Christ comes to live in our hearts through faith. That's from Ephesians 3 17. Christ comes to live in our hearts through faith.

Why? Because He topples that operating principle. No, no, we suddenly find when Jesus comes into our life that I am not the center, He is. And out of the newborn comes the words, Jesus is Lord.

Not me, Jesus is Lord. We cry out, Abba, Father. By this new operating principle inside of us, it's called the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who begins to abide in us, dwell in us, and begins to pour out the love of the Father into our hearts.

And we know as we grow in Christ, newborns, babes in Christ, we begin to know this wonderful posture of receiving the Lord's kindness, the Lord's love, the Lord's gentleness. And we begin to drink as the New Testament describes, both through Paul in 1 Corinthians, also in Hebrews chapter 5, we begin to drink of the milk of the Word. 2 Peter 1 says, as newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk that will grow us up unto salvation.

Longing for that milk. And yes, we preach milk of the Word. Yes, we do.

In it and by it, we establish the foundations of faith. We establish that the elementary principles of faith as we preach the milk of the Word, things like, if God is for us, who can be against us? See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God. No, no, I will not fail you.

I will not forsake you. Even the valley of the shadow of death there stands our shepherd. This is all that undergirding premise of watching and allowing and being part of Jesus, washing us, cleansing us, serving us, loving us, saving us.

The danger is that we stay newborns all our days. That we never grow up in Christ. That we never mature in Christ.

And the problem that happens is that we then see that the milk of the gospel is the only gospel and it becomes the fullness of the gospel. But it's not the fullness of the gospel. And so the gospel distorts.

It becomes milk that's diluted. And in essence, we begin to see a different gospel emerge. And what is that gospel? God is for us.

Wait, wait. God is for me. He is at the center, but he's chosen to make me at the center.

I love this gospel. And I'll tell you what, and you'll just forgive me, I'll just tell you the way it is. Our preachers see that.

They see that what you want to hear is it's all about me. What's in this for me? And so we begin to preach this milk diluted, this milk different gospel. And we find that people start coming.

They get attracted. The churches begin to grow. We must be doing something right.

People love this. Oh, they're coming in droves. They love to hear about them.

I have just given you the fundamental background to the letter of 1 Corinthians. In it we find, in the opening chapter, chapter 1 and verse 10, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and same judgment. It's been reported to me by Chloe's people that there's quarreling among you.

Go to chapter 3, verse 1. But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, mature people, but as people of the flesh, infants, babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you are not ready for it. But you are still not ready.

You are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only as a human? Something's wrong here. You see, too many years on too much milk puts the me principle back at the center of the gospel, and it kills.

It does not save. By the time we get to 1 Corinthians in chapter 9, they're actually saying to Paul, are you really an apostle? Should we be paying you really? And Paul, bless his heart. I've learned that being here for so many years.

Bless his heart. Spends 14 verses milk to milk. He literally comes against it.

Milk to solid milk. He gives it to them. He lays down fundamental scriptures of leadership in the Old Testament, but then he comes to verse 15, and he comes to the gospel, the full gospel, which has

changed him, which has saved him.

This gospel that compels him. He cannot do anything but preach this gospel, and it doesn't matter. He won't even use his rights free of charge.

It doesn't matter. Why? Because this gospel has been everything to him. In it, he has met Jesus, and that's why in verse 19, this verse, he makes us grow up.

It's a big boy verse. People call it big boy pants. I don't know what they call it, but it's a growing up moment.

It's a moment where suddenly we realize, wait a second, he's talking about something else, and that word servant is the word that drives this conversation. That word servant, it topples the kingdom of the devil. Why? Because he's never servant.

He's always dominating and in control and in charge. It topples the principle that undergirds everything. That it's not us, everybody, out for themselves.

It topples that obsession that we have with the tyranny of me. Look at the words again. Look at the words.

They are the words, 1st Corinthians 9, 19 of the Apostle Paul, but look at them carefully. Listen to the echo behind them. When you hear the echo behind them, whose words are these first? These words belong to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who in Mark chapter 10 verses 43 to 45 says, if you want to be great, become a servant.

If you want to be first, become a slave. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for men. These words change everything.

You see, he is the eternal opposite of the devil and this present age and the fuel behind this present dark age. Listen to the way Paul says it in Philippians chapter 2. He did not regard, Jesus did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself or made himself of no reputation. He did not come to us in his transfigured glory.

He wasn't born in his transfigured glory. He didn't walk the streets in his transfigured glory. He didn't walk the streets with the secret service, the legion of angels all guarding and protecting him as he spoke forth the good word.

No, no. He came in humility. He came in compassion.

He came in poverty. It doesn't make any sense because everything that this world says is the opposite. It's the eternal opposite of that which the devil has said.

No, no. It's about me. It's about control.

It's about dominating. It's called the tyranny of self. Beginning with the ruler of this world and going right down to our very own souls, we're in bondage to it.

We're in captivity to it. But listen to our Lord. He's different.

He is holy. He is separate. It's not him.

His heart, his heart is different. His passions, they're different. His character is different.

He made himself no reputation, no reputation. And what happens then? You'll find this in the next part of Philippians 2. He took the form of a bondservant. Same word in Greek.

It could have said, I've made myself a bondservant. Jesus took to himself, he took to himself a bondservant. What does that mean? The words in Greek are two and sometimes they are interchangeable, as in Luke chapter 22, 6 and 7, verses the Mark 10 passage I referred to.

The word *doulos*, bondservant. The word *diakoneo*, deacon. We get the word deacon out of it.

It means to serve. And and this is this is the image behind it is that you're a table. You're at the dining room table.

You're with all the dignitaries. You're you're about to feast and somebody comes alongside to serve you, to serve you meal. That's the picture, to serve tables.

But Jesus takes it another step in John 13, where not just serving of tables, but he takes off his robe. He he takes off his robe. He he grabs the water and the basin.

He gets down on his knees and he washes the feet of his disciples as a servant, as a bondservant. The lowest, the lowest place on earth. He takes the lowest place on earth to wash the feet, to serve us.

This is but a picture of what he will do on Calvary's Hill, as he not just washes our feet or washes us, he cleanses us by the blood come from his heart, from his veins. The blood of the Lamb that cleanses, that washes, that delivers us from the tyranny of self. Listen to the way it's said in Scripture.

He was pierced for our transgression. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought him peace was upon him, for by his wounds we are healed.

You see what he's doing? He's he's serving us. He's he's a servant. He's made himself a bondservant to us, that we might be one, set free, rescued for his kingdom, and not the kingdom of the world, and the flesh, and the devil.

He's come to set us free. Oh, I wish we could take this one verse, this one moment that captures our Savior's heart. I wish I could go all the way back through the Old Testament with you, and see everything through this lens, because Jesus said in John 14 8, he said the words, whenever you see me, you see my Father.

And suddenly by seeing the heart of Jesus, here we see the heart of our Father, not just from the beginning, but from all eternity. Caught in the eternal communion of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, where God, who is perfect love, sets forth the kingdom that's not about me, it's about others. And the Father pours out his love upon his Son.

The Son pours out his love upon his Father, and the Spirit of God glorifying the Son, glorifying the Father. The eternal community, the communion of God from the beginning. Others, not me.

Others, not me. This is why when he spoke forth his name in Exodus 34 6 and 7, the Lord, the Lord is compassionate. He is gracious.

He is slow to anger. He is abounding in loving kindness and faithfulness. Friends, do you believe that? It's our Father's heart.

It's the image that you and I were originally made in, which is why Jesus came to take us out of the kingdom of self, and into the kingdom where compassion reigns. When that happens, we are changed. How are we changed? The posture shifts.

We don't just receive, which is the milk of his word, all that he has done for us, but we begin to grow up and mature that all we receive, as he has done to us, we begin to do for others. Why? Because 2nd Corinthians 5:15 teaches us, yes, he died for all. He rose for all.

He came to seek us to save the lost. Yes, he did. That we might no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died and rose again on our behalf, so that when he's done washing, he'll take up his clothes and say, as I've done to you, I'm sending you out in the power of the Holy Spirit to do for others.

If you know my heart, you'll understand. I came to serve. Guess what? Now it's your turn to go serve.

And that is how we grow up in Christ. That is the heart of our discipleship statement, where we live as Jesus lived, love as Jesus loves, while helping others do the same. What's underneath it? He's changing us.

It's not about me. It's not about me. It's about the power of God the Spirit pouring his compassion, his love inside of us, and changing us, which makes the world of the Christian Church utterly different.

We come, we receive, we receive from his Word, we receive in prayer, we receive from the table, we receive in the power of the Holy Spirit to go and serve. To turn this world upside down, because this world is still under the tyranny of protecting self-interest, and that is not the kingdom of God. And the moment they die, they'll find that out.

Our job is to bring that gospel that we might win all the more. Our job is to serve. Our job is to serve.

Our job is to be a servant to all, because that's the heart of our Savior. My dad saw this. I lost my dad two weeks ago, Wednesday.

He went to be with our Lord. He saw this. We grew up in the church.

We grew up in a church that forgot to preach the gospel, but it was a lovely church. All the traditions and rituals, it just didn't save us, didn't rescue us. So when my dad was in the mid-40s and my mom died, at the same time his job collapsed, the finances collapsed, and my dad didn't know what else to do.

And some men came around him. This was in the days of, in Pittsburgh, when there was a ministry of men to men. They would have breakfasts or lunches, and my dad was invited to go to one, and he heard the saving gospel of Jesus.

And a man came around him, and my dad came to saving faith. My dad began to see the vision that it's not something that's containable, that that which we've been given, we need to, this faith needs to be lived. He was a businessman.

You never talked about these things in the business world, and suddenly my dad realized that's where it all, that's where the rubber hits the road, that's where it all meets. It's taking the faith into culture, to serve.

Not to lord it, not to be arrogant.

No, no, it's the opposite. To serve. And my dad, in the church, he began to see it that the church has known this forever.

The church has always known this. Why do I say that? Because the church has had a position from the beginning called deacon. It emanates from Jesus, the servant, the deacon, who came not to be served, but to serve.

And the early church got it. Already in Acts 6, we are choosing the first deacons, who need to be full of wisdom, and faith, and power, and grace, and might, to go serve the people, to serve the needs of the people. Diakoneo, deacon, those who are set apart.

My dad saw, my dad saw that the deacons in the church were to be the examples, the models, the one that lifted high the banner, that said, listen to us, everybody, if you're a Christian, if you belong to Jesus, it's time to grow up, to receive. Yes, receive the milk, but grow up. And when you grow up, you'll find that as you receive, you'll give.

That which he's given to you. We are blessed in this church with deacons like Beth, and deacons like Erlin, and deacons like Karen, and deacons like Skip, that hold the banner in this church. No, no, it's not just them.

They are holding the banner for us, that we might be a servant to all. To all. No distinction.

All the prejudices that we have against a people group, or a race, or a color, or a language. There's, there's neither Jew, nor Greek. There's neither barbarian, or Scythian, or slave, or free man.

There's, there's no male, there's no female in this conversation. Not this conversation. No, no.

To the Jews, I'll become like a Jew. To those who are strict under the law, I'll become strict under the law. To those who are outside the law, the Gentiles, they don't have a law, this law, I will be as those outside the law.

Of course, I'm under the law of Christ. He puts parenthetically. To the weak, I'll become weak.

To all people, I will become whatever they need, so that they might hear this gospel, and come off what the culture is telling us, and begin to know the love of God, found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Oh, that stabs at the heart, because it touches all the prejudices we have for people who are not like us. My dad knew that.

So he began on Wednesday nights, oh yes, down to the Mission Center in Stamford, Connecticut, with people who are broken, and people who are, who are addicted, and people who've come out of prison, and people who just needed to have their feet washed, to know what compassion is like, what love is like, what mercy is like, that he who washed my dad's feet, that he could now in the same power, in the same spirit, wash somebody else's. Why? That they might know Jesus. And so my dad, he held up that banner.

You know, when I sat with him the last few days, and it was actually the last day I was with him, he didn't know his body was failing. He didn't know these were his last days, and he said to me, he said, you know, when I shake this, and he always shook it, he shook everything, I mean, very healthy all his 91 years, he said, you know, I have got to call my senior pastor, and find out where in 2018 I am called to serve. He

was ordained a deacon in 1986, 31 years ago, last December, so that he could hold that banner to us all.

It's the last sound that we hear in the church, Catholic or Anglican or Lutheran, the liturgical churches, we have deacons, and the last sound we have from the deacon, very last sound at the end of the service, let us go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. It's time to serve. It's time for us to go serve, and we respond back, thanks be to God.

No, no, no, did you hear what the deacon said? This is his final word. He's calling, no, no, rise up. It's time for all of us.

We've been given the power of God the Spirit. It's time to take the world by force. Compassion, mercy, the way he's loved us, we get to go love others.

Now is our hour. Now is our time. That is the last sound the deacon gives, and that is the sound I hear.

I think of my dad. A few hours before he died, he was still unconscious. The one next to him, his wife said, oh, he never opened his eyes, but he he was a Navyman.

He gave a final salute. He stepped off the stage, so you and I can step on the stage. The power of God the Spirit, end the tyranny of self.

Receive what Jesus has given, so we might go serve, serve, serve, as we have been served, until our final breath. In Jesus' name. Let us stand together, and let us state our faith together with one voice.

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